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Report of the Friends of the Chair on Agricultural Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its forty-first session (see E/2010/24, chap. I.A), the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Friends of the Chair on Agricultural Statistics. The report presents the progress made in the development of the implementation plan of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics, which was endorsed by the Commission at its forty-first session.

An inclusive process, with the involvement of all key stakeholders at the national, regional and international levels, has been established in order to develop the implementation plan, which adopts a regional approach to take account of the different levels of statistical development among regions and ensure ownership by regional institutions. The implementation plan provides for the development of a standard framework for the country assessment that will be used as a basis for the implementation of targeted interventions at the national level. A comprehensive technical assistance programme, an articulated training programme and a targeted research agenda have been developed. A governance framework with coordinating structures at the global, regional and national levels is proposed. The Plan outlines a comprehensive strategy for the mobilization of resources and technical support from developed countries, the donor community and international organizations providing technical assistance. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the steps taken in 2010 for the development of the implementation plan and approve the next steps for 2011.

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Report of the Friends of the Chair on Agricultural Statistics[1]

I. Introduction

1. The purpose of the present report is to describe the progress made in developing the implementation plan of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics (hereinafter referred to as the Global Strategy). It also summarizes the steps taken to integrate input from stakeholders and to obtain regional ownership.

2. The United Nations Statistical Commission initiated the process of developing a Global Strategy during its fortieth session, in February 2009, at which a consensus was reached on the need to address the current unsatisfactory situation of agricultural statistics and to launch a renewed initiative of statistical capacity-building in order to strengthen national agricultural statistical systems. The Statistical Commission established a Friends of the Chair Group on Agricultural Statistics to steer the development of the Global Strategy. The process involved extensive consultations with all key stakeholders, including national statistical offices and ministries of agriculture, in international meetings and sessions of the governing bodies of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). To reach out to a broader audience, an online forum was also organized through a Wikipedia web page (wiki.asfoc.ibge.gov.br).

3. The Global Strategy was finally prepared by the World Bank and FAO, with substantial input from the Friends of the Chair working group. The purpose of the Global Strategy is to provide a framework to enable national and international statistical systems to produce the basic information needed to guide decision-making in the twenty-first century. The Global Strategy is based on three pillars:

(a) Establishing a minimum set of core data that countries will disseminate on a regular basis to meet current and emerging demands;

(b) Integrating agriculture into national statistical systems in order to meet the expectations of policymakers and other data users that statistical information be linked across the economic, social and environmental domains;

(c) Fostering the sustainability of agricultural statistical systems through governance and statistical capacity-building.

4. The Global Strategy defines a comprehensive conceptual framework for the production and use of agricultural and rural statistics, and for the information requirements of various data users. The conceptual framework, the assessment of national agricultural statistical systems and the choice of a core set of indicators all point to the need to integrate agriculture into national statistical systems.

5. The Global Strategy identifies the main tools upon which this integration will be achieved. The development of a master sample frame for agriculture will be the foundation for all data collection based on sample surveys or censuses. An

[1] The Friends of the Chair on Agricultural Statistics is led by Brazil and includes Australia, China, Cuba, Ethiopia, Italy, Morocco, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda and the United States of America. Eurostat and the World Bank participate as observers, while the Food and Agriculture Organization and the United Nations Statistics Division serve as secretariat.

integrated survey framework will be established to provide comparable data over time and across countries, using an annual survey of selected core items and periodic data collection from a set of rotating panels covering economic and environmental issues. The integration across data domains will also be ensured by an integrated data management system for all official statistics related to agriculture.

6. The Global Strategy was presented at the forty-first session of the Statistical Commission, in February 2010, where it was unanimously endorsed. The Commission urged FAO and the Friends of the Chair to expedite the development of the implementation plan aimed at strengthening national agricultural statistical systems, with the steps necessary to develop the master sample frame, the integrated survey framework and the data management system. The Commission recommended that a comprehensive technical assistance and training programme should be established. It also recommended that the implementation plan should include a well-targeted research agenda to support the implementation of the statistical methodology required by the Global Strategy and the development of methodological guidelines for specific conditions in developing countries, such as small-scale agriculture, agriculture under difficult conditions and nomadic populations. The Commission recognized that the implementation of the Global Strategy would require the mobilization of resources and technical support from countries, the donor community and international organizations providing technical assistance. The Friends of the Chair group was requested to report back to the Commission at its forty-second session on the progress made in the development of the implementation plan.

II. Actions taken in 2010

7. Since the Statistical Commission decision of February 2010, important progress has been made in the preparation of the implementation plan. Under the auspices of the Friends of the Chair group, several specific meetings were organized. These meetings served two purposes: to generate and receive further input on the implementation plan, and to obtain a commitment from the main stakeholders. The draft outline of the global implementation plan and the complete draft of the implementation plan for Africa, available as a background document to the Statistical Commission at its current session, are the result of this wide consultation with national and international statistical organizations, as well as with agricultural ministries and other governmental organizations represented in FAO governing bodies.

8. A worldwide consultation on the first drafts of the global and Africa implementation plans was held at the Fifth International Conference on Agricultural Statistics in Kampala from 13 to 15 October 2010. About 300 senior experts from 77 countries attended the conference, during which the technical sessions focused on the content of the four technical components of the implementation plans (country assessment framework, technical assistance programme, methodological research agenda and training programme) and governance mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels. The content of the plans was reviewed and discussed in detail in the light of the experiences of countries and regional and international agencies, and valuable inputs and recommendations were provided for the revision of the plans.

9. A round-table meeting of donors was held during the conference on 13 October, which resulted in an expression of strong support for the plan by the donors present at the meeting and a willingness to consider funding for its implementation at the global and regional levels.

10. At the end of the conference, the Friends of the Chair held a meeting to discuss the outcomes of the conference and ways of developing the implementation plans, taking into account the recommendations and technical inputs provided by the experts. The Friends of the Chair group formed four task teams to lead the development of the four technical components with the support of FAO.

11. The draft outline of the implementation plan was also to be presented to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Committee on Statistics at its second session, to be held in Bangkok from 15 to 17 December 2010.

III. Goal of the implementation plan

12. The goal is to implement the Global Strategy in each country so that the resulting output meets international quality standards and is comparable across countries.

13. The implementation plan will provide the framework for the country assessment that will be used as a basis to begin implementation at the national level. The plan will provide the statistical standards that will guide the development of the required methodology and determine the training and technical assistance requirements. In order to avoid duplication of effort and ensure the international comparability of the resulting agricultural statistics, a global, regional and national governance structure will be established.

IV. Developing the implementation plan

14. A regional approach has been adopted to take account of the different levels of statistical development among regions and to ensure ownership by regional institutions. Implementation plans are therefore being prepared at the global and regional levels.

15. The implementation plan needs to build on the main pillars of the Global Strategy. The first pillar — the minimum set of core data — is based on the assumption that it is not possible for every data requirement to be met every year. Therefore, the foundation on which to begin the implementation is the agreement to begin with a minimum set of core data. Country assessments should focus on the current capacity of each country to provide the set of core data. They will give indications on the needed resources, training, technical assistance and methodology. The Global Strategy provides a choice of methodologies to establish the master sample frame and the set of integrated data that needs to be tailored to the situation of each region or country. The country assessment should help the region or country to decide on the methodology and determine the training and technical assistance it needs. While the Global Strategy emphasizes the need to integrate agriculture into national statistical systems (second pillar) and provides guidelines, it leaves it up to each region or country to determine how to do so.

16. A critical part of the implementation will be establishing governance (third pillar) to coordinate the implementation efforts at the global, regional and national levels. A main governance issue at the national level will be to integrate agriculture into the national statistical system. The annex to the present document provides an overview of a proposed governance structure and the responsibilities of global, regional and national organizations.

17. In accordance with the recommendations of the Statistical Commission, a technical assistance programme, an articulated training programme and a targeted research agenda are being developed as key elements of a comprehensive **statistical capacity-building programme**. Moreover, the strengthening of country and regional systems will be based on a comprehensive assessment of their technical and operational capacities that will identify actions at the country, regional and international levels in order to define priority areas, resources required and the relevant time frame.

(a) **Country assessment**: This effort should begin with the preparation of a framework and accompanying guidelines for countries to provide an assessment of their statistical capabilities, the data they currently provide and their readiness to begin to implement the components of the Global Strategy. The assessment should determine the national capability to produce the minimum set of core data on a sustainable basis, and indicate the main areas in need of improvement to be supported by the implementation of the Global Strategy. National strategies for the development of statistics should be reviewed and, where necessary, revised to reflect the requirements to produce the minimum set of core data. The country assessment should include an evaluation of the extent of the integration of agricultural statistics into the national statistical system. It should also include an evaluation of auxiliary data, such as that coming from administrative sources. These assessments will provide the basis for the choice of methods to develop the master sample frame, the integrated survey framework and the data management system. Based on the assessment of the statistical capabilities and the revised national strategies for the development of statistics, the technical assistance and training requirements should be outlined. National action plans based on revised national strategies will identify the responsibilities of the different stakeholders;

(b) **Training**: Implementation of the training component of the Global Strategy will aim to: (i) strengthen the capacity of national agencies concerned with the collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of agricultural statistics by increasing the knowledge, skills and competencies of their staff; and (ii) strengthen and sustain the capacity of regional and subregional training centres to develop and deliver good-quality training in statistics-related topics. The country assessment should contain a review of the training needed in each country to provide it with the capability to begin the implementation of the Global Strategy and sustain the system over time. One issue is that training for agricultural statisticians needs to be integrated with the training needs of other sectors or elements of the national statistical system. The effort should begin with a detailed analysis of training needs so as to provide a baseline assessment. Training needs to include data users in order to help them understand how the data can be used. It is recognized that technical assistance will be required in order to assess training needs and provide training;

(c) **Technical assistance**: Technical assistance will be required in many areas, depending on each country's capabilities. The starting point will be the need

for technical assistance identified by the country assessments. Such assistance should also provide guidance for the development of national-sector strategic plans for agricultural statistics and for their integration into national strategies for the development of statistics to produce the minimum set of core data. Technical assistance will include the following: support to establish the governance structure; undertaking advocacy and policy dialogue between Government and development partners for mainstreaming agricultural statistics; determining the methodology to be used; and providing guidance for the overall implementation. The technical assistance should be coordinated at the regional and global levels in order to ensure that consistent methods are used, resulting in internationally comparable output. This coordination requires a global and regional governance structure to implement the Global Strategy. A key technical assistance principle, however, is that there should be country ownership in the implementation process;

(d) **Research**: This component of the implementation plan aims to improve agricultural data collection and management by preparing technical guidelines and handbooks on advanced methodologies, standards and tools related to the pillars of the Global Strategy. Developing countries face challenges in collecting data that will allow them to estimate agricultural production. For example, smallholdings and multicropping practices pose problems for measuring crop areas and production. Crop-cutting methods are difficult to apply for root crops. In addition the conceptual framework for agricultural statistics calls for a linkage between the farm, the household and land use, pointing to the need to establish a sample frame using new methodology such as remote sensing. The Global Strategy also presents an opportunity to make use of other new technology such as global positioning systems. For developing countries, there is a need to adapt existing relevant methodologies available in developed countries. When necessary, new methods will be developed for specific issues faced by developing countries, such as the enumeration of nomadic livestock and the production of root crops and mixed crops.

18. Standards need to be defined and operational guidelines provided on statistical methodology for sample frames, sample survey frameworks (including concepts and definitions) and techniques for data collection, validation, estimation and analysis.

19. The technical components will be coordinated through an overall logical framework that will ensure that the linkages among training, technical assistance and research activities are integrated and properly sequenced. An important purpose of the global implementation plan is to provide an overall monitoring system, including indicators, to assess performance of the regional implementation plans.

20. The main challenge faced by the Global Strategy is that its implementation should result in consistent and comparable results across countries. The integration of agriculture into national statistical systems poses another challenge, and will require considerable effort where the national statistical offices and ministries operate their own independent statistical programmes. In order to manage the implementation plans and monitor progress, avoid duplication of effort and ensure the international comparability of the resulting outputs, a **governance framework** is proposed, with coordinating structures at the global, regional and national levels. Strong global and regional support will be required to coordinate the country assessments and provide technical support, training and methodological standards so that the end results are internationally comparable. The implementation plan must also deal with the fact that the membership of the Statistical Commission is made up

of national statistical offices, with ministries of agriculture having little or no voice. The establishment of a governance structure should consider lessons learned from the governance structure used for the International Comparison Programme; however, the implementation of the Global Strategy will depend on the capacity of each country to determine the starting point, the choice of methodology and the pace at which it will proceed. The annex to the present document provides a more complete proposal for a governance structure at the global, regional and national levels.

V. Output

21. The output of this effort will consist of global and regional implementation plans of the Global Strategy. The outputs of the global plan are global public goods, as well as the structures necessary for the implementation of the Global Strategy. Global public goods include:

(a) The framework for assessment of the status of agricultural statistics in countries;

(b) Guidelines and materials providing advocacy for national statistical systems;

(c) Statistical standards that guide the choice of methodology to integrate agriculture into national statistical systems;

(d) A governance structure that provides for global, regional and national coordination of the establishment of statistical standards, guidelines, training, technical assistance and methodological development;

(e) The development of globally applicable training materials and online resources.

22. The regional implementation plans adapt the global frameworks, norms and statistical standards to regional peculiarities and needs, as needed. They analyse national statistical capacities and develop the systems of support to countries in terms of diagnosis, planning, integration into the national statistical system and implementation of national plans. In addition, they design the region-specific research programme and the support of agricultural statistical capacity development in countries and the region. The programmes under the regional implementation plans produce region-specific public goods and services, and country-specific capacity development support for which there are regional or subregional economies of scale. These activities will enable countries to prepare their national sector strategic plans for agricultural statistics and mobilize corresponding resources in order to produce the minimum core set of data.

23. It is proposed that the regional implementation plans be developed through strong regional ownership, with the regional commissions and regional development banks as coordinators and other regional and subregional organizations as partners. This is the model followed in the Africa region, where the implementation plan for Africa has been developed through a regional partnership. The African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Economic Commission for Africa, with the support of FAO, have taken the lead as regional coordinators in preparing the first regional implementation plan, with the participation of several regional partners like the

African Union/New Partnership for Africa's Development, the Economic and Statistical Observatory of Sub-Saharan Africa (AFRISTAT), the Economic Community of West African States, the West African Economic and Monetary Union and the Southern African Development Community. The plan for Africa includes many elements which are relevant globally and also region-specific.

24. The implementation of the Global Strategy will proceed in stages. In the first stage, the outputs will focus on the framework, the country assessment, the development of regional implementation plans and the mobilization of resources for implementation. The regional implementation plans can move forward when regions are ready to develop their initiatives.

25. It is expected that the implementation of the Global Strategy by countries will result in the substantial improvement of agricultural statistics in the next decade, particularly in developing countries. The progress will be measured through indicators similar to those selected in the implementation plan for Africa. For example, the implementation plan for Africa sets the following targets against the baseline of 2010:

(a) 60 per cent of countries producing and reporting minimum sets of core agricultural data;

(b) 80 per cent of countries having functioning coordination structures for agricultural statistics (up from a current level of 28 per cent);

(c) At least 35 countries with a sector strategic plan for agricultural statistics designed in the context of national strategies for the development of statistics for the integration of agriculture into the national statistical system (currently, 19 countries have such national strategies).

VI. Resource mobilization strategy

26. Agricultural statistics have been considered a low priority on the agenda of both donors and national Governments for many years. A renewed initiative of resource mobilization is essential to attract the attention of donors to the current status of agricultural statistics and to the benefits of better-quality statistical information for designing and monitoring policies in support of agricultural and rural development. A substantial amount of funding will be needed to improve the quality of agricultural statistics and build a sound and sustainable agricultural statistical system in developing countries. The initial estimate of the budget needed for the execution of the first phase of the implementation plan for Africa is about $50 million.

27. The objective of the resource mobilization strategy is to secure adequate funding and support for the global and regional implementation plans. The global implementation plan will be supported by a global trust fund for agricultural statistics. As discussed in previous sections, it is expected that funds from the global trust fund will be allocated for global public goods and to regions where the mobilization of resources is weaker.

28. In the Africa region, the regional implementation plan will be supported by a regional trust fund, to be managed by AfDB.

29. In order to ensure broader support, donors will have the opportunity not only to contribute to multi-donor trust funds, but also to earmark funding for specific technical components of the implementation plans or for supporting bilateral country programmes.

30. An essential component of the resource mobilization strategy is the communications campaign advocating for the global and regional implementation plan and for the importance of sound national agricultural statistical systems. Donors meetings will be organized on the sidelines of the forty-second session of the Statistical Commission and at FAO headquarters. It is also foreseen that a series of high-level visits to key donor agencies will be undertaken by senior officers of FAO, the World Bank and AfDB. The global and regional implementation plans will also be presented at the next meeting of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (Paris21) Board in April 2011 and of the Global Donor Platform for Rural Development in order to reach out and obtain support from the user community as well.

VII. Next steps

31. Substantial progress has been made in the development of the implementation plans at the global and regional levels, particularly in the Africa region, but more work is needed to complete this task. The next steps that FAO, under the guidance of the Friends of the Chair group, will have to undertake in 2011 include:

(a) Organizing (and participating in) international and regional statistical meetings to review the draft global implementation plan and regional plans. Upcoming meetings include the next sessions of the FAO regional commissions on agricultural statistics in Africa and Latin America, as well as the next International Statistical Institute session in Dublin;

(b) Completing the country assessment framework and assessments in the Africa region;

(c) Developing, based on the country assessment framework, a suite of indicators to be used to measure progress in the improvement of agricultural statistics;

(d) Establishing the Global Strategy Steering Committee, the Global Coordinating Office and the Technical Advisory Committee to steer the implementation of the Global Strategy;

(e) Collaborating with regional organizations that can take a leadership role in the development of regional implementation plans in the Latin America and the Asia-Pacific regions, while in the meantime incorporating best practices and lessons learned from the progress made in the implementation plan for the Africa region;

(f) Moving forward on the resource mobilization strategy establishing the global and regional trust funds. Several donor meetings and joint visits to key donors are planned;

(g) Finalizing the global implementation plan of the Global Strategy, to be presented to the Statistical Commission in 2012 for final endorsement.

32. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the steps taken in 2010 for the development of the implementation plan and to approve the next steps for 2011.

Annex

Governance

1. The proposed governance framework specifies the roles and responsibilities of the global, regional and national governing bodies. The governance framework should bring together agricultural statistical organizations at all levels of governance, starting at the global level. The proposed governance framework also defines linkages among governance structures at all levels.

Global governance framework

2. The global governance framework foresees the establishment of a Global Strategy Steering Committee, a Global Coordinating Office and a Technical Advisory Committee. The overview of the global governance framework is presented in figure I below and is described in more detail in the following paragraphs and sections.

3. The Friends of the Chair group will terminate its mandate with the development of the implementation plan and will be replaced by the Global Strategy Steering Committee, which will include representatives of national statistical offices and the statistical offices of ministries of agriculture. The Global Steering Committee should also include representatives of the regional coordinating organizations and representatives of key data users.

4. The primary role of the Global Strategy Steering Committee is to ensure that ministries of agriculture and national statistical offices both have a voice in decisions taken by the Statistical Commission on matters relating to agricultural statistics. In addition, the Global Steering Committee should provide strategic leadership and oversight of the Global Coordinating Office to ensure that the implementation follows the principles provided in the Global Strategy. The Global Steering Committee will report regularly to the Statistical Commission and to the governing bodies of FAO.

5. The Global Coordinating Office should be located in the Statistics Division of FAO. The main responsibilities of the Global Coordinator will be to establish standards, provide centralized technical guidance and rule on issues that can be interpreted in different ways in different regions. The Global Coordinating Office will serve as the secretariat for the Global Strategy Steering Committee, provide the country assessment framework to be used, jointly establish with the regional secretariats the framework for a training programme and technical assistance for the regions and countries, develop statistical methodologies for the second pillar of the Global Strategy and document these methodologies in a series of statistical manuals, serve as the focal point for seeking funding, provide overall coordination support for countries in regions that do not have a viable regional coordinating body and work in collaboration with the Wye Group on Statistics on Rural Development and Agriculture Household Income, formed by the Commission to develop best practices to link farm operations with farm households.

6. The Global Coordinating Office will be assisted by a Technical Advisory Committee that comprises experts in fields important for the implementation of the Global Strategy, namely sample frame development, sample and survey design, development of statistical databases for dissemination purposes, use of technology

(such as remote sensing and geopositioning sensors) for the production of agricultural statistics and electronic data collection, and use of administrative data. The Wye Group or its successor may contribute to this committee on issues relating to rural statistics and rural household income and well-being.

Regional governance framework

7. The Governance structures established at the regional level should be determined by the regional organizations that are leading the regional implementation plan. Such structures may include a regional steering committee, a regional coordinator office and technical advisers; nevertheless, their exact nature will be defined by the regional implementation plan.

8. Regional coordinating bodies have the major role of providing direct training and technical assistance to integrated national statistical systems. Regional coordinating bodies should also liaise with other regional and subregional offices within their regions in order to coordinate their efforts with countries, avoid duplication of effort and ensure that global standards are being followed. In particular, the regional coordinators are responsible for the following: seeking and providing funding to support the implementation of the Global Strategy at the regional level; providing technical support to countries to carry out the assessment of national statistical systems for agriculture; ensuring that national strategies for the development of statistics are revised to reflect the principles of the Global Strategy; jointly determining with the Global Coordinator the training and technical assistance requirements for the region; adapting methodologies provided by the Global Coordinator to the requirements of the region; conducting research, as required, to determine how to implement methodology provided by the Global Coordinator; forming regional steering committees; providing overall coordination of training activities and technical support to be carried out in the region; and developing partnering arrangements involving countries with well-developed statistical systems to support those countries in need of capacity-building.

National governance framework

9. Governance at the national level involves the organization of a national coordination mechanism that brings together the national statistical office, sector ministries and other agencies that provide agricultural data.

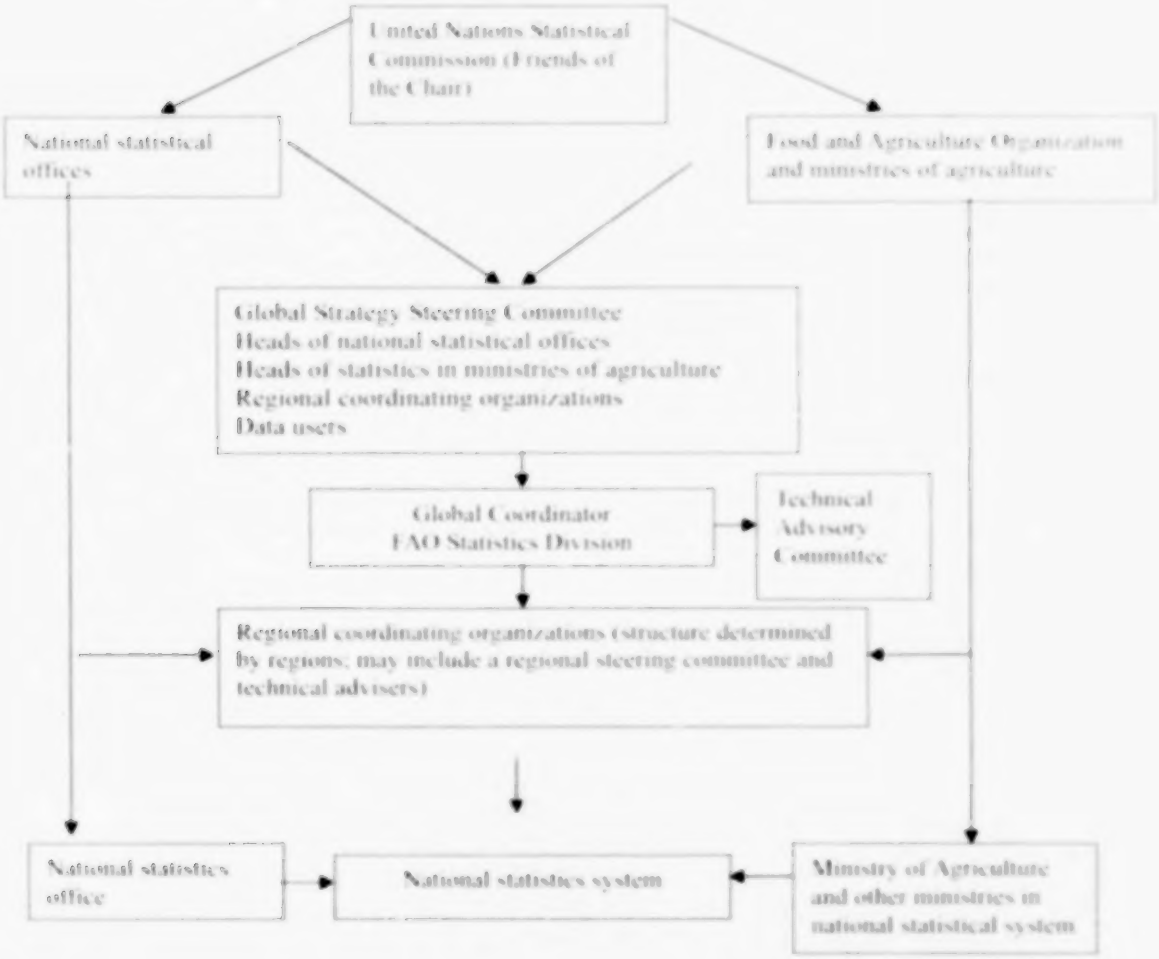
10. The coordination mechanism should ensure that the different data producers adhere to a common set of standards defined in the global and regional implementation plans. Adoption of these standards will prevent duplication of efforts and resources, as well as the publication of conflicting data. The coordination mechanism should provide a common voice for seeking resources for the agricultural statistical system within the framework of the national statistical system. The governance it provides should enable the ministries and agencies involved in the collection of agricultural data to integrate agriculture into the preparation of national strategies for the development of statistics.

11. The integration of agricultural statistics into a national statistical system implies that responsibility should be shared through the coordination mechanism. The role of each institution should nevertheless be clearly defined.

12. In order to fulfil these requirements, national governing bodies for agricultural statistics will have to be set up (where they do not already exist), with the responsibility of coordinating the detailed assessment of the country's agricultural statistics, determining the set of core data as prescribed by the Global Strategy, developing a national workplan to implement the Strategy, contributing to the revision of national strategies for the development of statistics and identifying the respective roles and responsibilities of each organization in the national governing body, implementing or revising legislation regarding the authorities and responsibilities for agricultural statistics and fostering public support for funding to ensure a sustainable statistical system.

Figure I

Overview of the governance structure to coordinate the implementation of the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics


United Nations Statistical Commission (Friends of the Chair)
National statistical offices
Food and Agriculture Organization and ministries of agriculture
Global Strategy Steering Committee
Heads of national statistical offices
Heads of statistics in ministries of agriculture
Regional coordinating organizations
Data users
Global Coordinator
FAO Statistics Division
Technical Advisory Committee
Regional coordinating organizations (structure determined by regions; may include a regional steering committee and technical advisers)
National statistics office
National statistics system
Ministry of Agriculture and other ministries in national statistical system